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ABSTRACT

Flexible work schedules offer the promise of a low-cost option for helping people manage work and family responsibilities. Alternative work schedules include part-time work, job sharing, work sharing, shiftwork, compressed work week, flexitime, and flexiplace. Flexitime is the most prevalent full-time flexible schedule and is second in prevalence only to part-time work among all flexible work schedules. Its prevalence in the workplace continues to increase steadily. Research studies on the effects of flexitime schedules have not proven very definitive because of design problems. They do suggest that in many work situations both the organization and the individual worker can gain from this arrangement. Unresolved issues involving flexitime include occupational constraints, the reluctance of supervisors, legal constraints, and union resistance. (The paper concludes with recommendations for researchers, public and private employers, labor unions, and government. A 21-item reference list is included.) (CML)

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30. WORKING HOURS FLEXIBILITY

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30. WORKING HOURS FLEXIBILITY

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With the nation poised to enter the last decade of the twentieth century, ongoing changes in the composition of the American labor force have given powerful appeal to the concept of flexible work schedules. The once dominant pattern of a sole breadwinning husband, who provided the total economic support for his family and whose nonworking wife assumed all child care and other family responsibilities, demanded few departures from the standard full-time workweek (e.g., 9 am - 5 pm, Monday-Friday). Increasingly, however, the labor force has become populated with employed wives and mothers, husbands of these working women, female single parents, older workers, and workers with physical handicaps and disabilities. This new heterogeneous cross-section of workers has major responsibilities for children (including young children), sick or disabled spouses, and elderly parents or relatives. The modern worker, in short, must frequently coordinate work responsibilities with significant family and other responsibilities. Flexible work schedules offer the promise of a low-cost option for helping to manage these multiple responsibilities. This paper considers whether flexible work schedules have lived up to, or will in the future live up to, their promise of reconciling some of the potential tensions among major life domains.

Alternative Work Schedules

Numerous departures from the standard workweek have now been tried in the U.S. and overseas. Collectively they are described as alternative work schedules. They vary from the standard workweek along at least three major dimensions.

Dimensions of Work Schedules

In the first place some alternative schedules can offer variability in the amount of time a worker spends working. Part-time work, usually defined as working less than 35 hours per week, is a major example. An important distinction is frequently drawn between permanent and temporary part-time work. Job sharing, in which two people share one full-time job, is a special case of part-time work. Work sharing, in which some or all workers reduce their hours during economic downturns so that certain workers will not have to be laid off, is another special case of part-time work. Yet another variant of part-time work is voluntary reduced work-time programs (or V-time) in which employees who are formally classified as full-time voluntarily work less than a full workweek. V-time, which requires the approval of the supervisor, is frequently an arrangement of limited duration. Still another type of part-time work is peak time according to which people are hired at premium rates to work only during high volume periods. Conversely, overtime work (or extended hours) represents a departure from the standard length of a workweek in the opposite direction.

A second dimension along which schedules may vary concerns the time of day during which work is scheduled. Shiftwork is the best known example of unconventional starting and ending times. The compressed workweek, in which fewer days are worked but more hours are worked each day (e.g., four 10-hour days), likewise entails departures from typical working times. Flexitime, which allows some choice regarding starting and finishing times, also illustrates the possibility of unconventional hours. Flexiplace (also known as remote work, homework and, in certain specific cases, as telecommuting) is an option that allows workers to work at home. While strictly not a special type of work schedule, in reality it allows workers to decide when they will do their work. Part-time work, of course, also exhibits a good deal of variability as to when work is done.

The third dimension on which schedules may vary concerns the amount of control (or choice or flexibility) that workers have regarding their schedule. Shiftwork scores low on this dimension of flexibility because shift schedules are typically imposed by management and workers may have little or no choice. Only a few workers would choose a nonday shift given a full range of options. Although sometimes a schedule that workers select, the compressed workweek is likely to be an imposed selection. Quite commonly, a company or a unit within a company converts to the compressed workweek and workers are simply expected to comply. Overtime work is sometimes at the discretion of the worker and sometimes not. The same is true of part-time work. Flexitime is, by definition, a schedule partially at the behest of workers. Job sharing,

V-time and flexiplace suggest high worker control; work sharing connotes the opposite.

Prevalence of Work Schedules

A 1985 government household survey provides information on the prevalence of various conventional and alternative work schedules (Flaim, 1986). Although the standard fixed workweek (40 hours, five days) remains the dominant statistical pattern, various alternative schedules register at nontrivial levels in the population. Over half of all nonagricultural wage and salary workers (53.7%) worked a 40-hour week in 1985; nevertheless, nearly one in five (18.7%) worked fewer than 35 hours per week (i.e., part-time), up from 16.4 percent in 1973 (Smith, 1986). Part-time workers are heavily represented in certain demographic categories: women, younger workers (ages 16-24), older workers (65 and over), and workers in retail trade and service industries (Nardone, 1986). Various types of compressed workweeks, although still very infrequent, have been growing at an accelerated rate (Smith, 1986). About one in six (15.9%) of all full-time wage and salary workers considered themselves shiftworkers (Mellor, 1986). Among the various shifts, the evening shift was the most common, followed by rotating, night and then split shifts. Shiftworkers were particularly likely to be male, young and black and to be found in specific occupations (e.g., protective service, food service, and health service) and industries (e.g., mining, transportation, retail trade, and personal, entertainment, and hospital services). One in eight (12.3%) of all full-time wage and salary workers reported that their work

schedules permitted them to vary the beginning and ending hours of work (the essence of flexitime) (Mellor, 1986). Such flexibility in the work day was more likely to be characteristic of men, whites, and workers in managerial and professional occupations. Interestingly, schedule flexibility was more common among part-time than full-time workers and less common among those on evening, night or rotating shifts than those on regular daytime schedules. In addition, over 18 million Americans reported doing some work at home on their primary job; of these, 1.3 million persons had worked the equivalent of a full-time week at home (Horvath, 1986). Full-time non-farm home workers were likely to be female, aged 56 or older, and employed in a service industry.

Certain company-based surveys have supplemented what is known about the changing prevalence of various work schedules. According to a series of surveys conducted by the Administrative Management Society (AMS), flexitime is on the upswing (AMS, 1988). Fully 31 percent of the 260 companies surveyed had flexitime schedules in use in 1988 as opposed to 15 percent in 1977. The same survey series showed job sharing to have been on a downswing between 1987 and 1988. Such company-based surveys, however, provide no direct information on the number of workers with access to specific work schedules because the schedules used by a company are typically available only to some undetermined proportion of its workers.

Flexible Work Schedules

The concept of flexibility is really a combination of two concepts, variability and worker control. Thus, flexible work schedules are essentially a subclass of alternative work schedules, those in which schedules can vary along either or both of the first two dimensions described earlier (i.e., amount and timing of work hours) and in which a high score is registered on the third dimension (i.e., control). Flexitime is the prototypic example of a flexible work schedule but some of the other alternative work schedules also qualify (e.g., part-time work in general, and the special cases of job sharing and V-time). When workers have some say in its selection, the compressed workweek can also serve as a flexible work schedule.

In addition to the flexible schedules selected from the roster of alternative work schedules are certain personnel time policies that constitute flexible departures from the standard workweek. Most of these include sanctioned leaves such as personal days, family sick leave (with option to stay home with sick children or other sick family members) and time off to select child care. Despite the importance to workers of these leave policies, they will not be further discussed in this paper. They belong to a discussion of employee benefits, all of which cost companies money, whereas the present paper concentrates on schedule variations that need not impose significant costs on companies and may even save companies money.

TABLE I

COSTS AND BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES

FLEXITIME

Benefits to Company	Costs to Company	Benefits to Workers	Costs to Worker
Increased labor productivity	Reluctant supervisors	Increased job satisfaction	Less over-time pay
Reduced absences and lateness	Unequal availability of flexitime to different types of workers	Easier commuting	
Lower turnover	Higher utilities and overhead costs	More and better family time	
Less overtime pay	Additional time keeping costs	Easier child care arrangements	
Easier recruiting	Labor union opposition		
Better use of production facilities	Labor law constraints		

PERMANENT PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Benefits to Company	Costs to Company	Benefits to Workers	Costs to Worker
Increased labor productivity	Opposition from labor unions	More and better family life	Lower wages and fringe benefits
Reduced absences and lateness	Supervision more difficult	Easier child care arrangements	Reduced career advancement
Lower wages	Training more expensive	Off-peak commuting	
Easier recruiting			

JOB SHARING*

Benefits to Company	Costs to Company	Benefits to Workers	Costs to Worker
Reduced absences	Higher fringe benefit costs	Better pay and fringe benefits	
Less overtime pay	Problems locating compatible partners		
Improved work coverage	Problems of coordination, communication and scheduling		

*The costs and benefits of job sharing also include those factors that are cited for permanent part-time employment but are not mentioned here.

COMPRESSED WORKWEEKS

Benefits to Company	Costs to Company	Benefits to Workers	Costs to Worker
Reduced absences	Supervision more difficult	Larger blocks of personal (i.e., nonwork) time	Child care on weekdays difficult
Lower turnover	Labor union opposition	Less commuting	Greater fatigue
Lower utilities and overhead costs	Labor law constraints		
Better use of production facilities			
Easier recruiting			

Costs and Benefits of Flexible Work Schedules

The accompanying table lists some of the major costs and benefits associated with various flexible work schedules (Nollen, 1982). Not all the costs and benefits listed for a specific schedule apply to all examples of that schedule and, even if a particular cost or benefit does apply in some situation, its magnitude may vary. The listing of costs and benefits does not, therefore, permit any definitive conclusion as to the overall positive or negative impact of a particular type of schedule on either the employer or the worker.

Many of the costs and benefits apply to more than one type of flexible schedule. Flexitime is notable for the paucity of costs to workers. Part-time work in general exhibits a more evenly balanced set of costs and benefits to workers. The special case of job sharing provides workers with significantly better wages and fringe benefits than does typical part-time work. In a sense, then, job sharing represents an attempt to divorce part-time employment from its traditionally low levels of status, pay and job security (Blyton, 1985). The compressed workweek, whose benefits to workers are not especially pronounced and may not exceed its costs to workers, encounters the most stringent opposition from labor unions and labor law.

A New Approach to Flexible Work Schedules

Flexible work schedules have tended to be conceived, introduced and evaluated one-at-a-time. Businesses, for example, that use the compressed workweek extensively are not likely to make heavy use of flexitime. Research studies have tended to focus on the effects of a

particular alternative work schedule (e.g., the compressed workweek). An alternative conception would emphasize an array of flexible work schedules. A corporation might offer its employees a choice of schedule options (flexitime, part-time, compressed week, etc.). Various combinations of these options (e.g., compressed workweek with part-time) might also be entertained. Individually-tailored schedules could even be negotiated with the relevant supervisor or personnel office representative. The central idea here is that the new breed of worker has a variety of time-related needs (e.g., the need to mesh work and child care arrangements; to be at home until children leave for school; to attend to family sickness and emergencies; to provide elder care services; to leave work early for education and career retraining programs; to schedule exercise, fitness and health activities during an extended "lunch hour"). Workers therefore need to be able to select from a range of schedules or even tailor an idiosyncratic schedule. Once the notion of matching the worker with a schedule is accepted, the research question shifts somewhat from "What are the effects of flexitime across all workers?" to "What are the effects of flexitime on workers who have selected that schedule?" and even to "What are the effects of working on a schedule of one's choice when the alternatives include flexitime, part-time, etc.?" Work schedules can thus be administered using a "cafeteria" approach, one that is analogous to but not overlapping with cafeteria benefits. It bears emphasis that schedules and benefits should not be linked or traded-off against each other. As noted, benefits cost the company money; schedules, if

properly managed, need not, and should be available to all employees without any related loss of benefits.

Flexitime

The remainder of this paper focuses on flexitime schedules. Flexitime is the prototypic flexible schedule. It is also the most prevalent full-time flexible schedule and is second in prevalence only to part-time work among all flexible work schedules. Furthermore, its prevalence in the workplace continues to increase steadily. Since space constraints preclude a detailed examination of each type of flexible schedule, flexitime has been selected for more intensive analysis.

The Components of Flexitime

Flexitime is really a whole class of flexible work schedules rather than a single schedule. All flexitime schedules allow the worker some variability of starting (and hence ending) time. The workday in flexitime consists of core time, during which all employees must be present, and flexible time, the portion of the day within which employees may choose their times of arrival and departure. Most statistics on the prevalence of flexitime refer to the basic requirement of flexitime, that is, the presence of limited control over starting and ending time.

These essentials aside, flexitime schedules can vary in a number of ways, each of which offers the possibility of additional flexibility that can be superimposed on the basic type of flexibility. In the first

place, flexitime is more flexible when core time is short and flexible time is long. Flexibility is also enhanced if the employees can vary their schedules on a daily basis (i.e., a gliding schedule) rather than only with prior notice (i.e., flexitour). More flexibility results when employees can vary the length and timing of their lunch hour. Similarly, flexibility increases when employees can vary the length of their workday while still working a full workweek (i.e., more hours some days and fewer hours on others, with the option to carry-over or "bank" a limited number of hours). Even more flexible is the option to vary the length of the workweek while still working the same total number of hours (i.e., more hours some weeks and fewer hours on others, with the option to bank some hours). In principle, still further flexibility derives from the option to vary the total amount of time worked as well as the scheduling of that time. Some people, however, would question whether such control over the amount of time worked is consistent with current definitions of flexitime. Control over amount of work may represent too much flexibility to count as flexitime. In any event, actual flexitime schedules may offer various combinations of these optional features of flexitime in addition to the basic requirement of some limited control over starting time, or they may be confined to just the basic type of flexitime.

Flexitime schedules can also vary along another dimension of flexibility that cannot be defined in terms of hours or days. This is the dimension of supervisory discretion and approval. Some flexible schedules are totally up to the workers; others need the approval of the supervisor. There is reason to expect an inverse relationship between

the level of flexibility permitted in the work schedule and the level of supervisory involvement required. Highly flexible schedules will typically require negotiations between employers and their supervisors so that worker preferences and business needs can both be accommodated. The more elementary components of flexible schedules, however, can be made available to workers on a routine basis. Schedules are obviously more flexible when they are not conditional upon the approval of individual supervisors.

Evaluative Research on Flexitime

An extensive body of research has evaluated the various effects of flexitime schedules. For a variety of reasons these research studies have not proven very definitive.

Design issues

At the outset, the studies have typically exhibited serious flaws of research design. Golembiewski and Proehl (1978), Tepas (1985) and others have cited the main weaknesses of the studies evaluating flexitime: (1) few studies use control or comparison groups; (2) few studies take a longitudinal perspective and evaluate the effects of the intervention after a satisfactory period of use; (3) most studies use only post-intervention measures, thus making it difficult to determine the existence and size of any changes from the pre-intervention phase; (4) studies tend to ignore possible effects of occupational differences; (5) the effects of organized labor are hard to determine because many of the interventions occur in nonunionized environments; (6) the validity

of the criterion measures is unclear because they tend to be idiosyncratic measures rather than standard scales; (7) actual productivity data are frequently absent; and (8) adequate statistical methods and controls are rarely used.

Empirical findings

Findings from the evaluative studies of flexitime should be regarded as tentative because of the design weaknesses discussed. According to Ronen's (1984) review of evidence, flexitime tends to have positive consequences for both the organization and the individual. In more specific terms, Ronen (1984) examined the reported relationships between flexitime and various indicators of organizational effectiveness. He found that flexitime tends to be associated with improvements in or maintenance of (but not decrements in) productivity levels. About half of the organizations studied reported improvements in productivity under flexitime; half reported no change. Results were more equivocal for measures of work scheduling and work coverage. About equal numbers of firms reported changes for the better, no change, and changes for the worse. Flexitime appears to have little effect on, or to improve, relationships with groups outside the organization (e.g., suppliers and customers). Furthermore, Ronen (1984) noted that employees consistently associate flexitime with improvements or no change (but not decrements) in work climate. On the subject of costs, he concluded that flexitime can be associated with significant reductions in overtime expenditures. More generally, flexitime seems not to be associated with significant overall cost increases and it may

actually produce savings for the organization. A more definitive conclusion, however, will have to wait until additional data are collected on the actual financial impact of flexitime.

Measures of organizational membership (absenteeism, tardiness and turnover) provided data favorable to flexitime. Ronen (1984) cited evidence that flexitime can reduce short-term leave and sick leave usage. The favorable results on flexitime and absenteeism suggest that flexitime alleviates the need to call in sick when employees need to attend to personal business. According to Ronen (1984), the impact of flexitime on tardiness is consistently positive, as long as organizations allow schedule discretion on a daily basis. The benefits of reduced tardiness, however, were not experienced by organizations that did not allow daily flexibility. Nollen and Martin's (1978) study found that turnover declined in just over half the cases of flexitime users. Ronen (1984) comments that flexitime can discourage withdrawal from an organization when employees perceive flexitime as an important benefit unobtainable elsewhere.

Ronen (1984) also reviewed studies of the relationship between flexitime and two types of job attitudes, overall job satisfaction and attitude toward the flexitime program. Changes in job satisfaction (and morale), he reports, are consistently positive. There is, however, one potential problem area. If certain employees are unable to participate in the flexitime program, their level of job satisfaction is likely to decline. All studies indicate overwhelming support among workers for the flexible schedules. Again, however, a qualification is in order. The attitudes of first-line supervisors are understandably less positive

and more complicated. Supervisors may appreciate flexitime as it applies to their own jobs but are more ambivalent about the flexitime schedules of their subordinates. As supervisors, they may encounter problems in the work unit that are caused by flexitime. Flexitime, in short, calls for major adjustments on the part of first-line supervisors.

Ronen (1984) reported general improvements in life off the job (e.g., home life, leisure, recreation and education) in conjunction with flexitime. Yet a more intensive review of the impact of flexitime on family life does not reveal impressively positive findings. Studies of family impact do show some limited benefits of flexitime. Amount of time workers spends with other family members may increase; level of conflict between work and family life may decrease; nonetheless, the findings are neither consistent nor fully convincing (Bohen and Viveros-Long, 1981; Lee, 1981; Shinn, Wong, Simko & Ortiz-Torres, 1989; Winett and Neale, 1980; Winett, Neale & Williams, 1982). Since much of the push for flexible work schedules comes from workers with major family responsibilities (especially from working mothers), some investigators have found the findings on flexitime and family life disappointing. Looked at another way, the meager connection between flexitime and family life may demonstrate that minimal flexitime (i.e., slight variation in starting time, no daily discretion) fails to satisfy the needs of workers with major family responsibilities.

To summarize, the evidence on the impact of flexitime is far from definitive. It does tend to suggest that in many (but presumably not all) work situations both the organization and the individual worker can

gain from this arrangement. Only in certain very specific areas (e.g., the attitudes and performance of first-line supervisors) is their major cause for concern.

Unresolved Issues Involving Flexitime

Flexitime and the other flexible work schedules have already made their presence felt in the workplace. Even though flexitime has cornered its share of the market and is gaining ground, it has a long way to go before becoming an option available to most workers. As noted, the driving forces behind flexible work schedules are the family and related needs of the contemporary American worker. If employers are to recruit and retain workers in a competitive fashion, they must respond to the felt needs of the working population. On the other hand, the push for flexibility encounters resistance from several sources. Some types of industrial work are not conducive to time flexibility. Supervisors and management harbor reservations about possible deleterious effects of flexible hours. Laws pertaining to working hours have constrained the viability of various flexible schedules. Unions have registered opposition to certain flexible arrangements.

Occupational constraints

Some types of work lend themselves less well than do others to flexible scheduling. According to Nollen (1982), flexitime is not well suited to manufacturing firms. Within such firms batch-process manufacturing holds better prospects for flexitime then do continuous-process work and assembly-line technology, which are least

compatible with the varying start and stop times inherent in flexitime. When workers must operate as a team, the prospects for individual flexibility are at a minimum. Even under the most adverse technological conditions, however, some work arrangements (e.g., group flexitime, swapping among operators) can introduce elements of flexibility. Moreover, when buffer stocks can be built up between work stations, when advance production scheduling is possible, when employees work somewhat independently and when workers have the skills to perform multiple tasks, the introduction of flexitime into production environments becomes more feasible. Even if certain blue collar settings are not conducive to flexitime, some limited components of time flexibility can usually be incorporated.

The reluctance of supervisors

Supervisors, especially first-line supervisors, are a pivotal party in the introduction and implementation of any flexitime program. In many organizations, lower level supervisors are granted considerable discretion over whether flexitime is permitted at all, what types of flexibility are acceptable, and who is given the option of flexitime. As noted, however, supervisors are the group of employees likely to be least favorably disposed to flexitime. The job of the first-line supervisor becomes more complicated under flexitime (Ronen, 1981, 1984). Such supervisors may lose some of their authority and control as workers are given more autonomy. Additionally, supervisors may face more complicated scheduling and planning tasks. One study of flexitime (Graf, 1978) reported an increase in the amount of long- and short-term

planning required of first-line supervisors and, likewise, an increase in the number of formal rules and regulations that supervisors generated to ensure smooth workflow in their absence. Furthermore, flexitime encourages a more participatory style of supervision, one that focuses on planning and coordination rather than monitoring. When the organization's climate or the supervisor's personality is authoritarian, flexitime will not be seen by the supervisor as a congenial innovation. In such circumstances it can require the supervisor to make a major adjustment.

For supervisory reluctance to be overcome, or at least minimized, supervisors need to be included in the process of planning and implementing the new flexitime system. They need to be trained so that they understand their new roles and responsibilities. They need to be provided with an appropriate organizational climate that encourages the participatory supervisory style that fits best with flexitime. Only then will supervisors realize that, notwithstanding the adjustments that flexitime requires of them, they can benefit from flexitime, as individual employees whose lives become more flexible and also as supervisors whose subordinates are exhibiting the lower rates of absenteeism, tardiness and turnover that are associated with flexible hours.

Legal constraints

Most of the potential legal constraints on flexible working hours derive from laws relating to maximum hours and overtime. Employers will be reluctant to agree to flexible schedules that exceed the maximum

hours of regular compensation and incur premium overtime costs. As Ronen (1984) has observed, the various laws regarding hours of work have tended to institutionalize fixed scheduling by requiring the payment of wage premiums for work in excess of 40 hours in a week and, in certain cases, eight hours in a day.

The simplest form of flexitime (i.e., variable starting time without banking or debits of hours) encounters no problem with maximum hours legislation. That is, when employees work a fixed amount of time every day (e.g., eight hours) their flexitime schedules do not trigger any of the overtime premiums mandated by the laws about maximum hours. On the other hand, flexitime that allows banking of hours across the days of a single week but not across a longer time period is likely to trigger overtime premiums if the definition of overtime includes "more than eight hours in one day." In addition, if banking of hours can occur across a two-week period (or even longer), flexitime can also trigger overtime premiums if the definition of overtime includes "more than 40 hours in one week." Put another way, as flexitime schedules become more flexible, they become more likely to run afoul of maximum hours legislation and the various rules regarding premium pay.

The impact of legal constraints on those flexitime schedules that allow banking of hours thus depends on the specific circumstances (i.e., types of organizations, employees, etc.) to which the various definitions of overtime (e.g., more than eight hours in a day, or more than 40 hours a week) apply. Unfortunately, the range of applicability of the various definitions of overtime is highly complicated and involves federal, state and local laws, as well as collective bargaining

agreements. Only federal law can be summarized succinctly. State and local laws concerning hours and overtime, like collective bargaining agreements, are highly variable.

In overall terms, federal law imposes the "not more than 40 hours a week" criterion of overtime on most workers and the "not more than eight hours in a day" criterion on a minority of workers. More specifically, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) imposes the "40 hours" criterion on most private sector employees (major exemption: many executive, administrative and professional employees) and most federal, state and local government employees. In general, the Walsh-Healy Act imposes the "40 hours" criterion upon employees who work on federal government contracts in excess of $10,000. The Contract Work-Hours and Safety Standards Act imposes both the "40 hours" and "eight hours" criteria upon employees engaged in federal construction projects. Title 5 of the U.S. Code imposes both the "40 hours" and "eight hours" criteria on most federal employees but Title 5 has been amended so that flexitime schedules and compressed workweeks can be introduced among federal employees without triggering overtime premiums when either of these overtime criteria is exceeded.

Several approaches may be adopted to minimize the legal constraints that maximum hours legislation impose on flexitime. In the first place, as noted, most simple flexitime programs (i.e., those without banking of hours) encounter no problems with maximum hours. By comparison, the compressed workweek frequently triggers overtime premiums unless special arrangements are made. Even when flexitime includes banking of hours within a single week, the infrequency of the

"eight hours" criterion means that most workers need not be paid at premium rates. Only when banking of hours uses a contract (or settlement) period longer than one week (currently, an infrequent situation) do the problems of maximum hours legislation affect a majority of workers. Even so, banking of hours still need not trigger overtime premiums if the workday and workweek are shorter than the overtime standards. In other words, if the standard workday is less than eight hours (e.g., seven hours) and the standard workweek is less than 40 hours (e.g., 35 hours), some banking of hours would be possible without overtime premiums being triggered. In those situations in which flexitime does trigger premium pay, laws or collective bargaining agreements need to be changed to redefine overtime (e.g., as more than 80 hours per biweekly period) or exemptions need to be sought.

Laws and agreements about overtime are not the only source of legal constraints on flexitime. Collective bargaining agreements may specify working hours arrangements quite narrowly (e.g., all employees work 9 am - 5 pm, Monday to Friday). Clearly, such schedule agreements need to be revised in the collective bargaining process if flexitime is to be allowed.

Union resistance

Ronen (1981) has observed that unions have used the collective bargaining process in order to improve terms and conditions of employment. For the most part their efforts have been directed at protecting and maintaining the economic position of the worker. Specifically, they have sought (1) to maintain and increase the level of

employment, and (2) to enhance the financial well-being of the individual worker. Three union policies have formed the basis for some union resistance to flexitime. In the first place, unions have bargained for a shorter workweek in order to expand the number of available jobs and to gain for workers as much leisure time as possible. Flexitime is viewed by some unions as a management compromise to a shorter workweek (i.e., a rearranged workweek gained at the expense of a permanent increase in hours). Moreover, such unions often view the compromise as offering illusory benefits for workers because they doubt that management will allow schedule choices to remain truly in the hands of workers.

Second, unions have strong views on the subject of overtime work. Unions fought for overtime premiums as a means to discourage excessively long work days and to augment the pool of available jobs. They also value the additional financial benefit workers receive when they do overtime work. Flexitime has been opposed by some unionists because they see it as decreasing the need for overtime. That is, under some circumstances, possibly engineered by management, workers could lose overtime premiums because their work no longer qualifies as overtime.

Third, some unions have opposed moonlighting because they desire to maintain employment levels. They have criticized flexitime in that it facilitates moonlighting by permitting workers to arrange their hours to accommodate a second job.

In short, as Ronen (1981) has pointed out, the concern of unions with economic issues such as the maintenance and creation of jobs through a shorter week, limited overtime and decreased moonlighting has

detracted from their commitment to the quality of life issues raised by flexitime. A survey of American union representatives (Swart and Quackenbush, 1977) found mainly support for or neutrality towards minimal flexitime programs (no debit or credit of hours), more opposition than support for a more extensive flexitime program (debits and credits allowed), and very little support at all for the compressed workweek. Union support for flexible hours diminishes, that is, when loss of overtime rights becomes a salient possibility (i.e., highly flexible flexitime schedules or the compressed workweek).

In the light of the foregoing concerns that unionists have expressed about flexitime, a program to introduce flexitime will be more successful if it specifies clearly (1) how overtime will be defined, decided and measured under conditions of flexitime, (2) how paid time off for personal reasons (e.g., personal days, medical and dental appointments) will be preserved under flexitime and (3) how the flexibility inherent in flexitime will, as far as is reasonably possible, be at the discretion of the employee rather than the employer (or supervisor). Even when there is no union, management would be well advised to involve employees in planning the alternative schedule and thus allaying the fears that unions have more formally articulated.

Recommendations

New directions for research

Although flexitime and other flexible work schedules have been investigated frequently, the research has rarely been done well.

Specifically needed are the following types of research studies:

1. Studies with sound research designs (i.e., control groups, measures of long-term as well as short-term effects, pre- as well as post-intervention measures, controls on occupational differences, controls on whether the work environment is unionized, reliable and valid criterion measures that include direct productivity data, and proper statistical analytic methods).

2. Studies that test for plausible explanations of the effects of flexible schedules. Existing evaluative studies of flexitime have given insufficient attention to the key explanatory issue, namely, how does flexibility affect job attitudes or productivity or level of work-family conflict. If flexitime reduces work-family conflict by facilitating child care arrangements it becomes important to ask questions about child care arrangements (plus possible breakdowns in such arrangements) and then use statistical methods to establish the flexitime--child care--conflict explanatory sequence. Alternatively, if flexitime improves productivity by taking advantage of workers' naturally occurring periods of high energy and alertness, the flexitime-energy-productivity connection needs also to be established directly.

3. Studies that distinguish among the different types of flexitime. It is an oversimplification to inquire about what effects, if any, flexitime has on various criterion measures. As noted, flexitime

encompasses a range of schedule arrangements. At one extreme is some minimal variation in starting (and ending) time such that the worker adheres to the same schedule every day for an extended period. Alternatively, greater flexibility can be introduced by allowing (1) day-to-day variation in the starting time (2) greater amounts of variation in the starting time (3) variations in the timing and length of the lunch hour (4) variation in the amount of work done each day or even each week (i.e., banking of hours). Flexitime would be expected to have different consequences depending on how many of these various types of flexibility are permitted. Research studies, therefore, need to determine the effects of different levels of flexibility within flexitime. In other words, they might compare (a) a standard week, (b) flexitime (low flexibility), and (c) flexitime (high flexibility).

4. Studies that make systematic comparisons among various flexible work schedules (e.g., flexitime versus compressed week). Additionally, one could also include in a study various schedule combinations such as the compressed week with flexitime.

5. Studies of a cafeteria approach to flexible hours. Researchers should be interested in the effects of flexitime specifically among workers who have chosen that schedule, and also in the effects of being able to work on a chosen schedule when a variety of options (including flexitime) are available (e.g., Harrick, Vanek and Michlitsch, 1986).

6. Studies that provide a financially-based cost-benefit analysis of flexitime arrangements. More needs to be known about how much it costs to introduce, operate, or expand a flexitime program. Cost-benefit data will directly address the issue of whether flexitime programs are or can be profitable from an employer's standpoint. Put another way, cost-oriented research would indicate those occupations and industries for which particular types of flexitime programs make economic sense from a management perspective.

Public and private employers

Flexitime has made inroads in both the public and private sectors of the economy. Its potential contribution will not be fully realized, however, until the following steps are given serious consideration:

1. Introduction of flexitime where none exists. In conditions of employment less favorable to flexitime (e.g., production work, team-based operations, etc.) some limited flexible arrangements can often be introduced. Pilot programs are an excellent way to introduce flexitime when doubts exist about its viability.

2. Introduction of <u>additional</u> flexibility where some already exists. Minimal flexitime programs can frequently be expanded in the direction of greater variability in starting time, introduction of daily discretion, flexible lunch hours and banking of hours. Current flexitime programs in the U.S. tend to exhibit low levels of

flexibility, often leaving plenty of room for elaboration and enhancement.

3. Introduction of formal flexitime policies where only informal practices exist. Workers are better served when flexible work schedules are authorized on a formal organizational basis than when they are determined informally. As noted, however, highly flexible versions of flexitime will typically require consultation between employee and supervisor to arrive at mutually agreeable schedule arrangements. In other words, certain basic types of flexitime can be made automatically available to workers within an organization; more sophisticated types of flexitime may require a process of negotiation between workers and supervisors (or other representatives of management).

4. Introduction of a cafeteria approach to flexible work schedules. Employees could be allowed to choose among an array of work schedules and could even be able to choose a schedule customized to meet their individual needs. In most cases the process of customization will entail a process of negotiation between the individual worker and representatives of management.

5. Implementation of flexitime in ways that guard against the objections raised by unions. Flexible arrangements could, in principle, allow employers and supervisors to gain unintended control over workers' hours. The flexitime program needs to introduce clear formal agreements and procedures that prevent these unintended effects. Similarly,

because schedule flexibility could become a cheap substitute for various employee benefits, it will generally be advisable to isolate schedule choices from choices among benefits.

Labor unions

Unions have pointed to possible risks for workers that are inherent in various flexible work schedules (i.e., loss of overtime pay, increased management discretion regarding work scheduling, etc.). Unions need to realize that workers, especially certain nontraditional categories of workers, can also lose substantially by not having time flexibility. The solution is thus for unions to help formulate arrangements for implementing flexible schedules that preserve the advantages of flexibility while minimizing the costs and risks from the worker's standpoint.

Governmental action

In addition to acting as a model and innovative employer, governments at various levels can take other steps that will facilitate the spread of flexible work hours:

1. Funding of research studies and demonstration projects.

2. Disseminating the findings of evaluative research studies, information about the prevalence of different types of flexitime in the U.S. and abroad, and information about whether and how flexitime can be implemented under various conditions including difficult circumstances.

3. Revising legislative definitions of overtime to refer to the number of hours worked in a week (or even in a two-week period) and not to the number of hours worked in a day. The process of revising laws on overtime premiums requires that governments address the concerns of unions that flexible work schedules can permit adverse consequences for workers. Governments can help find common ground among employers, unions and individual workers on which to base the introduction of flexible work hours.

There is a further and broader course of action that governments can follow, namely, to help increase the time flexibility of institutions other than the workplace. Much of the demand for flexible work schedules derives from the temporal rigidity of other social institutions (e.g., schools and the child care industry) which, along with the workplace, impinge on the lives of citizens. If some of the need for flexible arrangements could be met outside the workplace, the problems and pressures of daily life scheduling would be considerably diminished. Governmental organizations could help take the lead in encouraging time flexibility across major social institutions.

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